

The Aln Community Schools Federation

Applicable to The Duchess's Community High School

Policy - Attendance

This policy relates only to children of compulsory school age unless otherwise indicated

Principles

The aim of the Duchess's Community High School attendance policy is to enable the school to provide a consistent practice that encourages and facilitates the regular attendance of all pupils. Regular attendance at school is key to steady pupil progress and enjoyment of learning, and for this reason the school is dedicated to ensuring its attendance policy is adhered to as much as is possible.

The Duchess's Community High School takes a whole-school approach to maintaining excellent attendance and it is the joint responsibility of parents, pupils and all staff members to ensure that children are attending school as they should be. We endeavour to work with families to make sure that any problems or circumstances which may lead or be leading to poor attendance are given the right attention and appropriate support.

The Governing Body ensure that all legislation regarding attendance is complied with and that up to date guidelines are communicated to parents, children and staff. They regularly monitor review and discuss attendance issues at governors meetings.

Education is important. Missing school means missing out. Children should be at school, on time and ready to learn, every day the school is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. Permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent that can result in legal action by the Local Authority.

At the Duchess's Community High school, we recognise that children are sometimes ill or unhappy about attending school. Families can be going through unsettled times that can make regular school attendance difficult. Any problems with regular attendance, especially any concerns about possible bullying or learning difficulties are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the child. We will investigate, identify and strive in partnership with parents/carers and students to resolve those problems as quickly and efficiently as possible. We will adopt a clearly focused approach aimed at returning the student to full attendance at all times. A similar approach will be adopted with students whose punctuality is considered to be an issue.

On the first day of absence parents/carers have a responsibility to inform the school of their child's absence either by direct telephone contact with the main school office on **01665602166** or via email admin@dchs-alnwick.org

Every half-day absence from school has to be recorded by staff at the school as either **AUTHORISED** or **UNAUTHORISED**. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required, preferably in writing.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness or other *unavoidable* causes.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no "leave" has been given. These are an offence by the parent and include:

- keeping children off school without a good reason

- truancy before the register has been marked
- absences which have never been properly explained
- children who arrive at school too late to get an attendance mark
- taking holidays that have not been approved by the school in advance.

It is not usually possible for the school to authorise absences for shopping, looking after other children, minding the house, birthdays, day trips etc. Leave *may* however, be granted on compassionate grounds in an emergency (e.g. after the death of close relative).

Please note that a request for a term-time holiday is NOT a parental right. Leave *may* be granted in exceptional circumstances but arrangements should not be made without the school's agreement in advance. Taking leave without permission is "unauthorised" absence and can be subject to a Penalty Notice fine or other legal proceedings by the Local Authority.

Parents are asked to make routine medical and dental appointments outside school time wherever possible. Where such appointments in school time are unavoidable, staff should be informed in advance if at all possible. A "present" mark may still be awarded if the child attends for as much of the session as they can. It is always better to attend for some of the time, rather than missing the whole day.

The school recognises that there may be times where children of different faiths observe religious festivals that fall outside of school holidays and weekends, and will allow authorised absence for these times. Parents will be aware of these dates and should give the school written notification in advance.

The school has a period of study leave leading up to GCSE and A Level examinations where pupils are granted authorised absence to revise at home. The school operates study sessions at school within this time to help with revision and to reduce the amount of time spent out of school.

Exclusion is treated as an authorised absence. The headteacher/ form tutor/ subject teacher will arrange for work to be sent home.

All requests for authorised absence will be responded to in writing, and will outline the details of when the child is expected to return to school. Parents should contact the school immediately if there will be a cause for delay from the stated date of return.

Parents are expected to contact school staff and to work with them in resolving any problems together. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be sorted out in this way, the school may offer parents a formal Parenting Contract or refer the child to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) from the Local Authority.

The EWO will also try to resolve the situation by agreement wherever possible but, if other ways of trying to improve the child's attendance have failed, these Officers can use legal proceedings if required, including Penalty Notices (fines) or prosecution in the Magistrates Court. Alternatively, parents or pupils may wish to contact the EWO themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is available from the school office or by contacting the Local Authority.

Procedures

The school has a particular responsibility to reduce the number of children whose attendance is below 90% over the school year. These are called “persistent absentees” by the Government, whatever the reason for their absence. Special procedures may be applied to children at risk of falling into this category.

This table illustrates the number of days and lessons missed for each percentage attendance but does not show the additional opportunities that are missed within a school setting by being absent.

	Attendance	Whole days absent	Lessons Missed
Excellent	100%	0	0
	99%	2	12
Good	98%	4	24
	97%	6	35
Expected	96%	7.5	44
Cause for concern	95%	9.5	56
	90%	19	111
	89%	21	122
	88%	23	134
	87%	25	145
Unsatisfactory	86%	27	151
Serious cause for concern	85%	28.5	160
	84%	30.5	177
	83%	32	186
	82%	34	198
	81%	36	209
Critical	80%	38	221

Morning registration closes at 9.10am.

Afternoon registration is based on attendance to period 5 following lunch time and starts at 1.50pm (1.45pm on a Wednesday)

The school applies the following procedures in deciding how to deal with individual absences:

- On the first day of absence parents/carers have a responsibility to inform the school of their child’s absence either by direct telephone contact with the main school office on 01665602166 or via email admin@dchs-alnwick.org
- If a student is not present with their form teacher at this time and no planned absence has been granted, then an **N** will be entered and remain until an authorised reason can be given to change it.

If a student arrives in school after morning registration has closed, then a **U** code will be entered. Pupils who arrive after the registration period has ended should go straight to the school office to sign in and give a reason for their lateness. Any unjustifiable reason for absence will be marked as unauthorised. It is vital that pupils sign in at the office to ensure that appropriate health and safety

regulations are followed and that all pupils are accounted for. Persistent lateness may result in disciplinary action.

Parents will be contacted if a pupil gives a reason for an unauthorised absence and there is doubt about the truth of the excuse

- When the student returns to school after an absence, parents/carers must provide a signed, written reason for their child's absence either in the student planner or as a separate letter to be presented to the form tutor.
- If electronic registration indicates a student to be absent and no contact has been received from the parents/carers, a phone call will be made to the parents/carers informing them of their child's absence from school and asking for verification.
- If no contact is made by parent/guardians within 2 days of any absence, the school Attendance Officer may make a home visit.
- If the absence persists or if there are other issues with persistent and/or patterns of poor attendance (e.g attendance percentage is below 90%) a referral will be made to the EWO. Directors of learning for each year group meet weekly with the school Attendance Officer and fortnightly with the Education Welfare Officer to discuss concerns and strategies to support students and their families in improving attendance
- The EWO will contact the parents/carers directly making them aware of the legal requirements regarding school attendance and that penalty notices may be issued and / or court proceedings pursued.
- Attendance at parent/student workshops and / or panel meetings will be expected
- Where appropriate, students regularly identifying poor health as a reason for absence will be asked to produce a medical certificate from their GP.
- Upon return to school following an absence, form tutors are to check the student planner for an absence note, complete the proforma if appropriate and return with any other absence notes in the attendance file kept in the Pastoral office
- If a student has been absent for a week or longer a reintegration meeting is to be held with the student, parents / carers, Director of Learning and Attendance Officer to support the student in returning to school.
- Students with excellent attendance will be rewarded through the VIVO system and recognised at the school awards evening

Information about individual school targets

1. Whole School attendance target is 96% (4% absence)(national 5.1%)

This target is based on the knowledge that we have about the impact that time off from school has upon learning and progress. An absence rate of any greater than 4% overall for any cohort falls into the cause for concern category and can seriously impact on progress.

Within this, we also aim to meet the following targets;

Yr9 target – lower the absence rate by 2.2%

Yr10 target – lower the absence rate by 2.6% with reduction in unauthorised absence by 0.6%

Yr11 target – lower the absence rate by 1.4%

2. Target attendance for students in receipt of Pupil Premium funding is 92%. (8% absence)

National absence rate is 8.6% for this group. The figure for this group last year was too high and has been persistently too high for the past 3 academic years.

3. Target attendance for students with SEND is 90% (10% absence)

Specific work to be done in reducing rate of absence amongst SA+ students and reducing the persistent absence rate of this group

4. Reduce the overall level of persistent absentees by 2%

This target is set whilst recognising that the absence rate at which a student is considered a persistent absentee is changing to 10% (previously 15%). Whilst both male and female figures were above national average, specific focus will be in improving the level of persistent absenteeism amongst girls (2.6%)

To achieve these targets, the following projects and interventions will take place throughout each term:

- Full time attendance officer in place to coordinate actions, work with students and families and liaise with agencies
- Attendance focus group to meet once per month to review progress in relation to targets set and target specific individuals to offer support. Group includes Pupil Premium champion, SENCO, Attendance officer, Directors of Learning, Assistant Head Teacher and EWO
- Improved 1-1 targeted intervention with individual students and groups
- Allocation of specific staff to students with SEND
- Raise aspirations of target groups by working with community partners (including work placements)
- Incentives for positive attendance both whole school and targeted individuals
- Family / parent support workshops/evenings
- Greater communication and intervention at early stages of absence
- Improved work with students returning from periods of absence
- Restructured EWO working pattern with time allocated for home visits and parent support following school referral

Summary

The school has a legal duty to promote good attendance. Equally, parents have a legal duty to make sure that their children attend regularly. As a school, we recognise that improving absence rates is not easy and that our unique catchment area contributes to some of our attendance concerns. We are however, committed to finding ways to best support school attendance and working closely with parents to ensure as high levels as possible.

GUIDANCE ON TERM-TIME LEAVE

As you know your children should be in school every day. Absence is disruptive for them and for the school. But we recognise that some absences, like illness, may be reasonable and unavoidable and leave can be authorised in certain circumstances. If you wish to request leave for some reason other than your child's illness, you **MUST** discuss it with the school **BEFORE** you take the leave.

Leave should only be requested for the shortest time possible. Trips etc. of more than a few days should normally include times when the school is closed, or only part of the absence may be authorised. Any leave may be refused at certain times of the school year, such as exams weeks etc.

The headteacher has the power to grant leave in 'exceptional' circumstances only. These might include:

- Sudden unexpected incidents, such as when a family member dies or is very ill, or on other compassionate grounds;
- Special 'one-off' family events such as weddings, funerals and other occasional celebrations, (but **NOT** just because it is the child's birthday);
- Family holidays which have to be taken at certain times because of parents' work shifts and rotas or because their job requires them to work when the school is closed, (e.g. farming, the tourism industry or the emergency services);
- Opportunities to travel overseas for special events which cannot be held in school holidays;
- When your child has an extremely good record of attendance and there has been no other leave taken in the previous two years.

These are only examples. If you think the reason you need leave is 'exceptional', you **MUST** discuss it with the headteacher. Do not assume that because permission was given for someone else, you will be given permission as well. Every request will be treated on its merits and the full circumstances will not always be made public.

The school can impose reasonable sanctions for unauthorised absences including extra work to catch up or the loss of attendance awards for your child. **In the most serious cases, unauthorised absence can be classed as an offence by the parents and you could be subject to a Penalty fine by the Local Authority.** If you choose not to pay the fine, you may face prosecution if the absence meets the criteria set out in the LA's Code of Conduct. (You can ask to see a copy if you wish).

If you think the headteacher's decision not to authorise the absence is unreasonable, you have the right to make representations to the Chair of Governors, but the final decision over any action to be taken lies with the headteacher and the LA.

This policy is supported by our policies on **safeguarding, bullying, behaviour** and **inclusive learning**.

Revision Record of Issued Versions			
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